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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of employee assistance program (EAP) providers was designed to provide information necessary to the selection of an EAP provider for the Saint Louis Public Schools, Missouri. The most widely recognized functions of an EAP are to provide a confidential consultation to individuals with personal problems and to serve as a management support system for supervisors. The EAP can reduce operating costs associated with personal problems affecting employee performance. Options provided to supervisors enable them to demonstrate concern for the employee while continuing to maintain expected work standards. Interviews and site visits were conducted to gather information about the various EAP providers. As a part of the evaluation effort, eleven firms were surveyed by telephone about their EAP experience. The Division of Evaluation made four recommendations for the selection and utilization of an employee assistance program provider: (1) a multi-year EAP contract; (2) substantial training for all administrators and supervisors regarding the managerial function of EAP; (3) revision of the client opinionnaire cards; (4) inclusion of quality characteristics ratings at site investigations. Included is the survey of firms, with generalized responses supplied. (DWH)

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# A REPORT
# OF
# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

November, 1983

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# A REPORT
# OF
# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

November, 1983

Division of Evaluation and Research
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Executive Summary

Employee Assistance Programs
November, 1983

Thom E. Downey
Monte E. Dawson

This report provides central administrators and board members with the necessary information to select an employee assistance program (EAP) provider. The two basic functions of an EAP are to provide confidential consultation to individuals with personal problems and to serve as a management support system. The report details results of on site interviews with prospective EAP providers, a telephone survey of eleven major St. Louis firms regarding their EAP usage, and an analysis of EAP usage statistics with associated costs for St. Louis Public School (SLPS) employees. Concluding recommendations are offered.

Interviews with prospective EAP providers revealed commonalities that can be labeled necessary, but not sufficient attributes of a good EAP provider. These commalities in concert with a review of the literature yielded seven basic characteristics of a quality EAP provider; 1) confidentiality, 2) staff training and education, 3) ethics of client referral to long term counseling, 4) available references, 5) response time to appointment requests, 6) advertising, and 7) administrator/supervisory inservice. Additionally, EAP staff should be representative as to race and sex. Several counseling sites should be available and clients should be able to schedule evening appointments. Finally, in emergency situations, clients should be seen within 24 hours.

The telephone survey of eleven major St. Louis firms regarding their EAP usage provided a private sector contrast to SLPS's experience. The firms averaged longer contract periods and higher employee utilization than did SLPS. The private firms were concerned about the "image" of the EAP provider, hence they did not always select the lowest cost EAP provider.

Analysis of EAP usage statistics showed that the annual rate of utilization averaged 3.7%. The typical SLPS employee who utilized the EAP during the past three years was a self referred female seeking assistance for personal or family related problems. Nearly 50% of the SLPS EAP users were married, while the remainder were divorced, separated, single, or widowed. Age and length of employment of the users were widely distributed. The most recent cost per employee figure was $10.46 per employee.

The report makes four recommendations:

I. a multi year EAP contract

II. substantial training for all administrators and supervisors regarding the managerial function of EAP

III. revision of the client opinionnaire cards in order to secure more representative feedback

IV. site investigations of prospective EAP providers to include ratings of seven characteristics of quality.

## INTRODUCTION

This report is designed to provide central administrators and board members with information which can be used for decision-making purposes in selecting an employee assistance program (EAP). The EAP is a program for board employees which offers counseling services. The first two annual contracts were awarded to the Employee Counseling Service Division, Family and Children's Service. The provider for this past year (based on a six month contract, renewed and scheduled to expire December 31, 1983) has been Personal Performance Consultants, Inc. (PPC).

## METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study were obtained in several ways. Within the St. Louis Public Schools, the Division of Personnel, Director of Employee Relations, Treasurer, and Supervisor of Insurance provided assistance based on their experience with the EAP. They were instrumental in providing the data from past years which was used for the demographic comparison of current and previous Board EAP experience.

Outside of the St. Louis Public Schools, the evaluators made visits to two of the counseling sites operated by PPC and conducted a formal interview with their Area Manager. Additionally, telephone interviews were conducted with the EAP administrators of 11 major St. Louis firms which also use PPC as their EAP contractor.

Several constraints shaped this report. Because of the confidential nature of an EAP, this report is not evaluative per se. Instead, it attempts to capture and describe the salient aspects of any good EAP provider and to delineate characteristics that should be considered before the offering of a contract for service. Ordinarily, an evaluation would examine individual cases to ascertain beneficial effects of the program for individual employees. Again, because of the confidentiality inherent in an EAP, such a tact is not only improper, but impossible. Hence an alternative approach was undertaken.

The section entitled Employee Assistance Programs, Purpose and Function (page 3), details the two generally accepted functions of EAP's. These aspects were identified by reviewing current literature regarding EAPs and through an analysis of interview comments made by EAP providers and client firms. This section provides the reader with a context to analyze the SLPS utilization of available services.

The first evaluative section (page 5), titled Summary of Provider Interview and Site Visits, describes the policy, procedures and facilities utilized by PPC in providing the current EAP service. The second section (page 7), titled Survey Comparisons of the St. Louis Public School's Approach to an EAP and that of

Eleven Other Firms, reports on the experience of other PPC client firms. This survey was done because many of PPC's objectives (as well as those of the previous provider) are based in part, on their experience with other clients. It was felt that it would be helpful to know in what ways the experience of the St. Louis Public Schools was similar to, or differed from, that of other firms. A third section is included (page 12) comparing Employee Usage Demographics for the two different EAP providers.

**EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**
**PURPOSE AND FUNCTION**

There are two, widely recognized functions of EAP's:

First, to provide confidential consultation to individuals with personal problems.

Second, to serve as a management support system.

Individual counseling is the function that is most often associated with EAP's and frequently accounts for the majority of resource utilization. Under the current Board contract, it is clearly specified to whom counseling shall be made available and the pertinent problem areas that can be addressed through counseling.

As is typically configured, this mode of EAP functioning has the employee, or a member of his/her household, initiating a self referral for confidential counseling. The employee would meet with a counselor in a private, non-work location and together they would work out a plan of action to address the client's concerns.

The other basic function of an EAP is that of providing management support for supervisors. In this mode the management support function is threefold:

A) The EAP provides the supervisor with a referral source for an employee whose job performance is substandard.

B) The EAP provides personal skills training to enhance the overall efficacy of the supervisor.

C) The EAP provides consultation to supervisors to assist them in establishing effective management plans.

It is not uncommon for this function of an EAP to be underutilized. Ideally, this part of the EAP support system should enhance the operations of the organization by providing supervisors with additional resources. For example, supervisors often must respond to specific incidents which may be isolated or may be a part of a broader pattern of employee behavior. By utilizing the EAP's services, a supervisor could obtain assistance in determining

A) whether a work performance problem exists.

B) whether a confrontation with the employee regarding work performance is required, and if so, how to make that confrontation supportive.

C) whether the supervisor has implemented effective management methods.

D) identify options available to the supervisor.

Through the fulfillment of these two functions, the EAP can reduce the costs associated with personal problems effecting employee performance. Options provided to the supervisor enable them to demonstrate concern for the employee while continuing to maintain expected work standards.

## SUMMARY OF PROVIDER INTERVIEW AND SITE VISITS

In order to secure additional data regarding the functioning of an EAP, an interview was conducted with the Area Manager of PPC, and visits were made to two of the five available counseling sites. The goal of the interview was to learn more about the typical process that prospective clients would undergo if they sought service and to gather any demographic, anecdotal, or professional information that could serve to further elucidate the quality of PPC's assistance.

Most often, a prospective client initiates contact by telephone. At that point some mutual determination of the need to see a counselor is made between the client and PPC's secretary (or counselor, if appropriate). Also at that time, the initial demographic data used by PPC in their quarterly reports is obtained. Depending on the location selected by the client and whether the client expresses some desire for a particular type of counselor, an appointment is typically made for sometime during the coming week. If the situation is described as an emergency, the client will be seen that day. If the client fails to show for the scheduled appointment, PPC will initiate contact to reschedule the appointment. At all locations appointment times are staggered 15 minutes to reduce the likelihood of accidental meetings with acquaintances. Usually, a client will meet with a counselor for three to four sessions. If the nature of the client's concerns demand longterm assistance, PPC provides referral sources.

Legal contacts differ in that the problem is described by the client during the initial call. PPC then selects an attorney and has the attorney call the client on the telephone to discuss the problem and offer legal information. PPC then follows up with a call to the client two or three days later to confirm that assistance has been provided.

The professional staff of PPC are required to possess at a minimum a master's degree in a helping oriented field with at least three years of clinical experience. The staff consists of 10 fulltime professionals, two men and eight women. One of the women is black. During peak demand periods (evenings, Saturdays, August, and September), supplemental staff are utilized.

Clinically, PPC's supervision process seems adequate. The clinical supervisor meets weekly with each counselor to discuss his/her cases. Weekly inservice sessions with presentations on various clinical issues also serve to maintain the professionalism of the staff.

Two of PPC's counseling sites were visited to garner some sense of the ambiance of the locations. St. Louis Public School employees most often made use of the Creve Coeur office (56%). The downtown office was second (23%) followed by the midtown office (21%). Visits were made to the midtown (opened at the request of the Board) and downtown offices. Both offices were

well appointed and conveyed a proper therapeutic motif. Both had private waiting rooms to minimize chance meetings of colleagues. The midtown office would be inappropriate for the handicapped or elderly because of its third floor location, but mention of this is made when a client requests an appointment at that location.

## SURVEY COMPARISON OF THE ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS' APPROACH TO AN EAP AND THAT OF ELEVEN OTHER FIRMS.

The state-of-the-art in administering and evaluating EAP's is still developing. Because the provision of an EAP is relatively recent, a survey was conducted to permit a comparison of the St. Louis Public Schools' EAP policies and experience with those of other firms.

The purpose of the survey was to find commonalities among firms with EAP experience. It could then be determined if the Board program was following generally accepted practices. While this would be no assurance of correct practice, it would at least provide a reference point.

Eleven St. Louis firms, all of which have PPC as their EAP provider, were contacted. A structured interview was conducted with the person designated responsible for the firm's EAP. Most often, this person was the director of personnel.

The eleven firms surveyed were:

The City of St. Louis
Commerce Bankshares, Inc.
General American Life Insurance Co.
Lever Brothers
Maritz, Inc.
Mercantile Trust Company
Monsanto, World Headquarters
Pet Incorporated
Ralston Purina Company
Spectrum Emergency Care, Inc.
Union Electric Company

The following table summarizes the responses of the various firms and compares them to the experience of the St. Louis Public Schools.

## A SURVEY OF FIRMS WITH EAP EXPERIENCE.

### GENERALIZATIONS COMMON TO ALL FIRMS INTERVIEWED.

1. **Has your company had firms other than PPC as your EAP provider?**

| FIRMS | BOARD |
|---|---|
| No, generally their first experience with providing an EAP was through Personal Performance Consultants, Inc. which was specifically selected. | Yes, we have had two firms over the past three years. |

2. **How long has PPC been the provider?**

| FIRMS | BOARD |
|---|---|
| The firms which were among the earliest to establish an EAP have had PPC for 5-6 years.<br><br>The firms more recently establishing an EAP have had PPC from 2-3 years. | Employee Counseling Service Division, Family and Children's Service - ? years.<br><br>Personal Performance Consultants, Inc. - 6-month contract (extended 6 months, expires 12/83.) |

3. **How was the provider selected?**

| FIRMS | BOARD |
|---|---|
| PPC was selected as the provider based on an investigation of the quality of the program offered, personnel and facilities, with attention to "word-of-mouth" from other companies with established EAP's. | Lowest Bidder |

4. **What is the term of the contract?**

| FIRMS | BOARD |
|---|---|
| Average term is two years, however, every firm indicated a desire to maintain continuity of service with the same EAP provider well beyond contract length. | Current contract term; six months.<br>Previous contract; one year. |

5. **Other contractural arrangements?**

FIRMS: Most firms have a cancelation clause requiring 90 days notice.

One firm has reserved the right to have an independent auditor review expense/service records. (This removes total confidentially and requires individual client authorization).

BOARD: The EAP provider was asked to open additional office space and is required to maintain liability insurance. A 90 day cancelation clause is included.

6. **Does the firm have any stated goals and/or what is the main purpose in providing an EAP?**

FIRMS: There was a basic belief that EAP's improved the productivity of the employee by offering counseling that reduced stress impinging on job performance and additionally, by addressing small personal problems before they became magnified and significantly impaired work performance.

Several firms claimed unmeasured cost savings on health care. All firms, however, insisted upon their basic commitment to provide the service regardless of quantified cost benefits.

BOARD: A policy statement has been prepared. The statement defines eligibility and employee problem areas that can be addressed by the counseling service.

7. **Does your firm evaluate the performance of your EAP provider? How?**

FIRMS: No formal evaluation procedures are utilized. The firms instead relied on a sense of accomplishment obtained from feedback cards, the lack of registered complaints, unsolicited testimonials from employees (in some cases, ranking officers of the firm) and a "reading" of the employees general attitude towards usage of the service.

BOARD: This report constitutes the first formal effort to provide evaluative information on the EAP and to indicate subsequent steps for evaluating the program.

8. **Do you seek reports on improved employee performance?**

FIRMS: No formal solicitation, survey or needs assessments conducted. Feedback on administrative referrals is requested.

BOARD: No formal procedures initiated. Feedback on administrative referrals is requested.

9. **What is your annual rate of employee utilization?**

FIRMS: Average, 7% to 8% of total employee group.

Firms ranged from a low of 3% to a high of 15% depending on the year.

BOARD: From a low in 1982 of 3.0% to a high in 1981 of 4.4%. The projected rate for 1983 is 3.7%.

10. **How many administrative referrals have you experienced?**

FIRMS: No precise data available. Most firms indicated few administrative referrals. Higher numbers of referrals were associated with jobs with directly measurable output.

BOARD: Approximately 3%. It is possible that a number of self-referrals originated because of informal administrative recommendation.

11. **What is your rate of return for employee feedback cards?**

FIRMS: Most firms average, approximately 40% to 50%.

BOARD: Currently at 5%.

12. **How is your EAP advertised to employees?**

FIRMS: Bulletin board posters
Newsletters/house organ
Home mailings.

BOARD Bulletin board posters
Newsletter (The Report Card)
Home mailings
Radio ads (KSLH)

13. **Have you had any complaints regarding your EAP? What is your procedure for handling complaints?**

FIRMS: All firms surveyed have had Personal Performance Consultants, Inc. as their EAP provider. None have indicated receipt of any justifiable complaints. No formal procedures exist for handling complaints.

BOARD: No complaints have been registered. No formal procedures exist for handling complaints.

In general, there was little variance among firms. The major differences in the Board's EAP experience, versus those of the surveyed firms, were in the areas of selecting a provider, contract length, the Board's relatively low employee utilization rate, and the boards' very low rate of return of employee feedback cards. The idea of selecting the lowest bidder without regard to quality was summarily rejected by all firms. Many of the surveyed firms noted that the image projected by the EAP provider, as well as the perceived professionalism of their staff, outweighed certain differences in cost. One personnel manager analogized selecting the lowest cost EAP provider to "trying to find the cheapest surgeon for a major operation." The rational for the longer contract length was the perceived need for continuity of service. In the respondents opinion, employee "word-of-mouth" recommendations over time contributed to a higher utilization rate and overall satisfaction as evidenced by the return of the feedback cards.

## EMPLOYEE USAGE DEMOGRAPHICS

| | Board Employee Profile 10/83 | Employee Counseling Service 1/81-12/81 | Employee Counseling Service 1/82-12/82 | Personal Performance Consultants 1/83-9/83 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **REFERRAL TYPE** | | | | |
| Self | | 98% | 98% | 97% |
| Administrative Recommendation | | 2% | 2% | 3% |
| **TOTAL NUMBER OF CLIENTS SERVED** | | 241 | 163 | 154* 205** |
| **ANNUAL RATE OF UTILIZATION** | | 4.4% | 3.0% | 3.7%** |
| **PERSON/GROUP SERVED** | | | | |
| Employee (with or w/o family) | | 97% | 98% | 92% |
| Family Member Only | | 3% | 2% | 8% |
| **SEX** | | | | |
| Male | 31% | 28% | 27% | 34% |
| Female | 69% | 72% | 73% | 66% |
| **RACE** | | | | |
| Minority | 65% | 56% | 58% | 48% |
| Non-Minority | 35% | 44% | 42% | 52% |

*This Figure Represents Only A Nine Month Period.
**This Figure Represents the Annualized Projection.

| | Board Employee Profile 10/83 | Employee Counseling Service 1/81-12/81 | Employee Counseling Service 1/82-12/82 | Personal Performance Consultants 1/83-9/83 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **MARITAL STATUS** | | | | |
| Married | | 47% | 46% | 47% |
| Never Married | | 9% | 17% | 21% |
| Divorced | | 21% | 26% | 21% |
| Separated | | 7% | 7% | 8% |
| Widow(er) | | 6% | 4% | 3% |
| **AGE** | | | | |
| Under 25 | 1% | 5% | 1% | 8% |
| 26 - 35 | 21% | 33% | 38% | 25% |
| 36 - 45 | 27% | 33% | 31% | 28% |
| 46 - 55 | 26% | 17% | 21% | 23% |
| 56 + | 25% | 9% | 9% | 16% |
| **LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT** | | | | |
| < 1 Year | 6% | 14% | 2% | 0% |
| 1 - 5 Years | 17% | 23% | 28% | 18% |
| 6 - 10 Years | 16% | 23% | 26% | 21% |
| 11 - 15 Years | 24% | 22% | 23% | 27% |
| 16 - 20 Years | 14% | 7% | 15% | 16% |
| 21 + Years | 23% | 11% | 6% | 18% |

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| | Board Employee Profile 10/83 | Employee Counseling Service 1/81-12/81 | Employee Counseling Service 1/82-12/82 | Personal Performance Consultants 1/83-9/83 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **JOB CATEGORY** | | | | |
| Supervisor | 5% | 5% | 1% | 6% |
| Professional | 61% | 69% | 77% | 69% |
| Clerical | 7% | 11% | 13% | 3% |
| Technical | 1% | 2% | 2% | 5% |
| Craft | 3% | 1% | 0% | 1% |
| Service | 18% | 5% | 4% | 8% |
| Sales | 0% | 5% | 0% | 0% |
| Other | 5% | 2% | 3% | 8% |
| **PROBLEM/CATEGORY** | | | | |
| Alcohol | | 8% | 9% | 21% |
| Family/Child | | 19% | 21% | 17% |
| Marital | | 16% | 18% | 14% |
| Legal | | 5% | 5% | 8% |
| Drugs | | 2% | 2% | 0% |
| Financial | | 9% | 6% | 4% |
| Psychological | | 5% | 5% | 25% |
| Medical | | 2% | 1% | 0% |
| Personal/Individual | | 29% | 30% | * |
| Job/Career | | * | * | 5% |
| Multiple | | * | * | 6% |
| Other | | 5% | 3% | 0% |

*Category Not Utilized By Provider.



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The typical utilization of the EAP during the past three years was by a self-referred female employee. Most often, the individual was a professional seeking assistance for personal or family related problems. Other generalizations can be made but caution is urged when interpreting these data. Care must be taken as to how generalizations interact with the profile of Board employees and the differences in identifying problem/categories by the two EAP providers. For example, education is in effect the industry of the SLPS, therefore, a high percentage of the work force is "professional." Another profile characteristic of Board employees that is atypical, when contrasted with the eleven surveyed firms, is the high percentage of black employees. Some apparent usage differences may be the result of definitions applied by each EAP provider. For example, ECS used the problem/category "personal/individual" while PPC did not. This may be the cause for the apparent increase in 1983 of "psychological" problems addressed by PPC.

## COSTS OF BOARD PROVIDED EAP's

| Year | Provider | Contract Cost Per Year. | Yearly Cost Per Employee. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1981 | E.C.S. | $114,240 | $20.77 |
| 1982 | E.C.S. | $108,800 | $19.78 |
| 1983 | P.P.C. | $57,530 | $10.46 |

ECS = Employee Counseling Service Division, Family and Childrens Service.

PPC = Personal Performance Consultants, Inc.

The above table presents yearly costs for the EAP services during the past three years. The costs were computed based on an employee population of 5500. It may be noted that the cost per counselee was not computed for two specific reasons:

A) Contract costs are based on the number of employees although services are provided to all family members residing with the employee. The effect is that the EAP provider is serving an open-ended population.

B) The service philosophy, as presently configured, is to provide full services to all employees and family members, as needed, without regard to dollar cost while limiting the dollar liability of the Board. Another philosophical approach would be to pay for and provide services on a per hour basis as needed by employees and family. Cost considerations would be difficult to resolve. An analogy would be the purchase of a machine maintenance contract versus payment for repairs as needed.

During the survey of firms, one manager indicated that he had made extensive attempts to develop benefit/cost models before finally concluding that the subjective elements of the program could not be accurately attributed. Part of the budgetary justification he gave to his supervisors for an EAP was the comparison of the cost per employee for an EAP versus the potential company costs of an employee beset with personal problems. He opined that the "potential costs" when the education of children was concerned, far and away exceeded those in industry.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Division of Evaluation will work with the appropriate parties in establishing a plan for the implementation of these recommendations and in developing strategies for the more effective use of EAP services.

1. **The Board should make every reasonable and legal effort to maintain a multi-year relationship with a single EAP provider.**

   Every firm surveyed for this report stressed the importance and cost effectiveness of remaining with a single EAP provider for a period of years. Following are some of the major benefits to be derived.

   A) Employee confidence in the capability of the EAP provider builds over time, influenced by familiarity and "word-of-mouth" recommendations.

   B) Cost benefits are realized immediately by a reduction of adminstrative training time required when changing providers.

   C) Through case experience and increased familiarity with the school system cycles, the EAP provider becomes better able over time to render assistance to administrators and to alleviate personnel problems.

   D) Employees benefit from improved service when the program termination date is not a factor in reducing case load to prevent carryover into the next contract period.

2. **A major effort should be made to acquire substantial training for all administrators and supervisors in recognizing the potential of integrating employee assistance programming into the managerial function.**

   A close working relationship between the EAP provider and individual administrators can improve employee productivity through ongoing consultation regarding good management practice.

   In addition to individual counseling, EAP providers can assist administrators in establishing a working environment conducive to productivity; in training supervisors in the early recognition of performance decline; in providing guidelines and support for effectively performing employee evaluations and supervising troubled employees.

3. **The employee opinionnaire card should be revised and options explored with the EAP provider as to how to secure a more representative return.**

   A) The Division of Evaluation should be called upon to revise the opinionnaire to ensure consistent data regardless of the EAP provider.

   B) The following options should be considered in order to secure a more representative return of opinion cards:

      a) Changing the location where the opinionnaire cards are sent in order to increase the rate of return.

      b) Consideration should be given to incorporating a letter from a school official to accompany the request for feedback. The letter would show genuine concern on the part of the Board for the employee and a continuing desire to provide a quality, valuable service.

      c) Quarterly meetings should be held with representatives of the Board and the EAP provider to discuss/evaluate the service of the previous quarter, specifically including client feedback.

      (Such meetings would allow valuable reflection on the organizational personality of the St. Louis Public Schools and could have implications for overall planning, such as, for staff development).

4. **Prior to the letting of a contract for the Employee Assistance Program services, the Board should conduct a brief investigation of the prospective provider to secure independent data regarding the overall quality of such services and potential value to the employees.**

   Typically, some of these characteristics of quality in an EAP provider are included in bid specifications: confidentiality, staff training and education, ethics of client referral to long term counseling, available references, response time to appointment requests, advertising, and plans for Board employee inservice.